Ireland Shock: Secret NATO Integration Almost Complete | Niamh Ní Bhriain & Fionn Wallace

Why is neutral Ireland suddenly rewriting its laws to send soldiers into foreign conflicts without a UN mandate? We are told our peaceful stance hasn't changed, yet we are seeing a rush to buy attack weapons and join EU battle groups. Is the government hiding a secret plan for war? To help me understand this shadow agenda, I invited Niamh Ni Bhriain, an author and activist at the Transnational Institute, along with Fionn Wallace, a former researcher at the EU Parliament. Together, we look past the official story to see how Ireland is being quietly pushed into a new era of militarization. Links: Neutrality Studies substack: https://pascallottaz.substack.com (Opt in for Academic Section from your profile settings: https://pascallottaz.substack.com/s/academic) Merch & Donations: https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com Timestamps: 00:00:00 Introduction: The End of the Triple Lock? 00:04:25 Why Remove the UN Mandate Now? 00:10:25 Performative Neutrality vs. Shadow Agendas 00:16:58 Crypto-Atlanticism & Secret Deployments 00:22:33 NATO vs. EU: Who is Driving Militarization? 00:35:55 Abandoning the "Irish Clause" & Opt-Outs 00:40:21 Will There Be a Referendum? 00:45:51 Public Opinion & Conclusion

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody. I'm Pascal Lottaz, an associate professor at Kyoto University in Japan, and my guests today are, on the one hand, the Irish author and activist Niamh Nguyen, a research associate at the Transnational Institute in the Netherlands, and Fionn Wallace, a former parliamentary researcher at the EU Parliament. Both of you, welcome.

#Niamh Ní Bhriain

Thank you, Pascal.

#Fionn Wallace

Thanks for having us.

#Pascal

Well, thank you very much for coming online. And Niamh, despite practicing your name before—sorry for butchering it again. But I'm very glad to be talking to both of you, because you're going to give us an update on Ireland. You told me that several political activities have been going on that

basically undermine what's left of Irish neutrality and Ireland's kind of pacifist foreign policy. Can we maybe start with you, Niamh? Can you tell us what's going on?

#Niamh Ní Bhriain

Yeah, so the government is planning to dismantle what we call the "triple lock" in the coming weeks and months, which will have a very significant impact on how Ireland relates to the world. Maybe I should explain what the triple lock is, because I'm not sure if your listeners will know. In Ireland, we use the term "triple lock" to refer to a piece of legislation that governs the deployment of Irish troops overseas. For Irish troops to be sent abroad—specifically, for more than twelve troops to be deployed—there are three levels of approval. First, there must be approval from the Cabinet. Second, there must be a parliamentary resolution, or a Dáil resolution.

Our parliament is called the Dáil, so there must be a Dáil resolution—that's the second. And then the third is that the mission those troops are being sent on must have a United Nations mandate. So that's the third part of the lock. Three locks: the Cabinet, the Parliament, and then the United Nations mandate must all apply to the mission they're going to. It's the United Nations element that the government finds intolerable, which, at this particular moment, is really—you know, they've got a brass neck, considering the United Nations is under significant pressure. Yet our government has decided that now is the time to revoke our legislative commitments to the United Nations.

Maybe I should just explain how the Triple Lock came about. Ireland joined the United Nations in 1955, and we started deploying peacekeeping troops in 1958. Then, in 1960, the government of the day brought in the Defence Amendment Act of 1960. That set out very clearly that Ireland, in its relation to the world—imagine this is the post–World War II, Cold War period, you know, when the United Nations had been set up to save future generations from the scourge of war.

And Ireland, you know, is telling the world: we will only send our troops overseas if they are part of a United Nations peacekeeping mission. We will not be part of a foreign force that's invading—an aggressive entry into anyone's country. We will only do so within these multilateral structures, and that's been in place since 1960. Irish troops have only ever gone overseas with a United Nations–mandated mission. The term "Triple Lock" came about in the context of the Nice Treaty, and then it was reaffirmed in the context of the Lisbon Treaty. And we can get into that maybe a bit more in the discussion.

But to say now, in 2026, the government is planning to remove the UN requirement and pave the way to deploy Irish troops on EU-mandated missions—you know, EU battlegroups, on NATO-led missions potentially, on virtually any mission—you know, we now have Ireland as part of the Coalition of the Willing. Ireland participates in Keir Starmer and Macron's Coalition of the Willing. And if that coalition were to deploy troops to Ukraine, for example, Ireland, without the Triple Lock, could also deploy on a mission like that. So we're in completely uncharted territory in Ireland. We've never deployed our troops on any mission that's not under a UN mandate. And here we are now.

#Pascal

Why are we here? I mean, Irish neutrality always kind of came out of being squeezed between, you know, freeing yourself from a former colonizer—the British Empire—in the 1920s and ’30s, and then, at the same time, not really wanting to support the Germans once the war started. So Ireland remained neutral; they kept that posture. There were ups and downs, but there were very important figures in your history in the 1960s—again, like Mr. Frank Aiken—who was really a torchbearer for Irish neutrality in the sense of: we will use diplomacy at the UN, but we will not participate in foreign wars.

This has been weakened over time, especially when it comes to Shannon Airport and a couple of basic principles. But the Triple Lock was very dear, as far as I can remember, to my Irish colleagues. Maybe, Fionn, do you want to jump in and give us your analysis of how it’s possible that the government is now thinking about taking away probably the most important of the three locks—because it’s the one that makes sure Ireland doesn’t decide something on its own, but instead multilateralizes the use of force?

#Fionn Wallace

Yeah, I mean, the concept of Irish neutrality really goes back to Wolfe Tone. Then you have James Connolly before the First World War, and De Valera keeping us out of World War II. It goes on from there—Frank Aiken, notably, was also a big proponent of diplomacy and of using Ireland's neutrality as a force for good at the UN. But the successive governments since then—basically since we started to open up our economy, letting Ireland be used as a kind of platform into the EU for the US, inventing experimental tax regimes, and allowing the encroachment of American-style foreign direct investment into Ireland in a very big way—since then, they’ve just chipped and chipped away at Irish neutrality.

And as you noted, we have Shannon Airport being used basically as a forward military airbase for NATO and the U.S. military. And then also, you know, very striking was Ireland’s role in the genocide in Gaza. Contrary to the global perception, Ireland played quite a pernicious role in that. We allowed loads of U.S. overflights and the transit of weapons through our airspace, also through Shannon. And then we had these votes in the Dáil, where Ireland—our central bank, actually—was the site for issuing Israeli war bonds. Twice, opposition parties put forward motions to stop this during a genocide, because we were effectively facilitating the financing of a genocide.

Twice, the government majority—just the plain majority—strong-armed the vote to make sure it continued. So it's kind of shameful. In public, there's this, you know, “we recognize the state of Palestine” and so on—there’s a performative element. But then, when it came to material measures, we weren’t doing anything at all. If anything, we were facilitating the genocide. And Francesca Albanese, in her most recent report, has named Ireland as a country that should be considered

complicit in genocide. But where we're at now is that they've even come up with a new concept that doesn't have any basis in international law.

They call Ireland militarily neutral. I mean, it just doesn't hold up. There was a case brought by Ed Horgan of Shannonwatch against the state back in 2004, but he didn't win. The judge in that case, though, found that his arguments about our neutral status were valid, in that there's no—like, the judge admitted this—there's no concept clearly laid out in international law that applies directly to the kind of neutrality Ireland promotes and works with. Basically, it means we do everything up to joining NATO. But this is more of a political neutrality. The government openly admits that America is our ally, that the EU is our ally, and so on, and that we provide support where we can. But now we really have a sharp departure from that, in the sense that if we wanted to send more than twelve, we'd have to go through the process at the Dáil level, through our government.

But now it's up to 50. So, without even a vote in the Dáil, we can send up to 50 troops into war-fighting missions. And the legislation—the Defence Amendment Bill 2025—makes this explicitly clear. It's kind of like omissions that leave open these loopholes. So it's very clear that it leaves space to collaborate with NATO and also EU-led missions. It's stepping outside the UN structure, which means it opens the door to illegal wars that we could take part in. And then, if they go through the process and the Cabinet agrees, and they get a simple Dáil majority at the Dáil level, then it's a limitless number of Irish troops that could go on these missions. This is a huge departure from where we were.

#Pascal

You used a very important word. You said that parts of Ireland's official foreign policy posture were performative. And we've seen this in other countries too—in Switzerland, in Austria—where, on the one hand, you have the performance of neutrality, the speech acts and so on, but in the background you have entirely different policies being worked on and actively pushed in white papers, government reports, government documents, strategy papers, and so on. Niamh, can you maybe speak to that a bit? How has this shadow agenda been pushed forward while the rhetoric still neatly aligns with what it used to be in the '70s and '80s?

#Niamh Ní Bhriain

Yeah, and I mean, there are even different levels of the performance. For example, there's one performance we get in Ireland, another one in Brussels, and another one around the world. So if the Irish state sends representatives to—well, I lived in Mexico for a few years—if they send representatives to Mexico, I remember when I was there, there were some official visits. We'd hear an awful lot about the Irish peace process and how important peace is, and how Ireland is about diplomacy and building peace and all of that. So that's the kind of performance you get around the world. This is how Ireland speaks to the world.

And that's what we see with Palestine as well. You know, we've recognized the state of Palestine—along with, I can't even remember how many other states—but Ireland makes a big performative gesture of it. Then there's a performance in Brussels, where we go every time there's a European Council meeting. The Taoiseach—our term for the prime minister—will go to Brussels and say, you know, Ireland is not shirking or shying away from its responsibilities with our European partners. And there's a performance there too, that we're one of these European states joining the Coalition of the Willing.

And then there'd be a performance here at home, saying none of this is going to impact our neutrality. Because the state, the government, they know that the Irish—if they were actually honest—they know that if they came out and said honestly to the people, "We are going to dismantle the triple lock because we want Ireland to sign up to EU battlegroups and participate in them," now we're actually in this very precarious situation. We have Irish troops as part of EU battlegroups, and we have the government saying in reports that we are ready to deploy. Those battlegroups have been operational since 2025. Ireland participates in the training exercises because our law permits us to go overseas for training exercises. But we're in this position now where we can't actually deploy because of the triple lock.

So the government has, you know, signed us up to the battlegroups. We go to all the training exercises. But if tomorrow the European Union decided to deploy a battlegroup, we couldn't deploy—and that's hugely embarrassing for the government. We can't deploy because we have the triple lock. For example, if Zelensky were to request a battlegroup to deploy into Ukraine, we assume that wouldn't have a United Nations mandate, so at the moment Ireland couldn't deploy. Instead of the government being honest with us and saying, "We want to remove the triple lock so we can send Irish people off to fight as part of EU battlegroups or on NATO-led missions," we were having a conversation about that.

Instead, they're performing. So again, it's a performance. They've concocted a load of nonsense—that the United Nations encroaches on Irish sovereignty and that we need to remove the triple lock. And these are direct quotes: "We need to take our sovereignty back." So we're constantly being told by the government that we need to remove the triple lock to take our sovereignty back, because the quotations usually include something like, "We can't give dictators like China or Russia a hold over where we send our troops overseas. Our hands are bound by these dictators." That's the kind of language we're getting from the government and from the media. So it's a performance again, for the people, so that we don't realize our neutrality is being torn to shreds right in front of our eyes.

And, you know, the government—it's like they want to be the best student in the class. They want to go over to Brussels and say, "Now look, we've gone and done our homework. We've gotten rid of this triple lock." When I spoke at the start, I mentioned Nice and Lisbon. That was hugely embarrassing for the government, because on two counts the Irish people said no—first to Nice, and then to Lisbon. And the reason we did so, in both cases, was because we were fearful that by signing up to those treaties, Irish neutrality would be eroded and we'd be forced into joining EU

military structures. So, in the context of those referendums, the government gave reassurances that, no, we have this thing called the triple lock.

We can only deploy with a United Nations mandate, and that guarantees we're deploying in a neutral way. And now we see that the people were right. We were right to be sceptical about Nice. We were right to be sceptical about Lisbon. Here we are, more than twenty years later—more than twenty years since Nice—and this is exactly what we predicted would happen. Now the government wants to deploy more to European Union military structures without actually going back and asking the people. So we get a lot of performative words and actions, and straight-up lies, coming from the government, because they know neutrality is extremely popular with the people. And if they were to come out and tell us that what they're doing is basically dismantling the final shred of our neutrality, there would be uproar.

#Pascal

Yeah, and just, you know, there's even research—a very good paper by a researcher called Philip Edius, with one more co-author whose name I've forgotten. Ireland was one of the three case studies, and he calls this phenomenon "crypto-Atlanticism"—people who hide their transatlantic affinities in neutral countries like Ireland, Austria, and Serbia. He found that the people he interviewed all wanted more integration into NATO and the Transatlantic Alliance, but they couldn't say so openly because the local populations wouldn't like that very much.

So what happens instead is that they start the preparations, right? You've already prepared integration into the battlegroups, knowing very well that it's not going to fly together with the provisions you have on the books—in your case, the triple lock. So what do you do? You work against the triple lock while already being prepared and create facts on the ground. Fionn, what's the situation there? Do you think at some point, even if the triple lock is still in place, these deployments will go over and beyond what's allowed under the current legal framework?

#Fionn Wallace

Yeah, I think there's already a lot that's been achieved on that level. I mean, in 1999 we joined the NATO Partnership for Peace, and we actually sent a small contingent—mostly officers working in an advisory capacity in Afghanistan. When they came home, people were surprised to realize we'd even been over there, because most had forgotten. I think we were there for about seven years or so. Then we joined PESCO—let's see when that came about—and I was working in the parliament at the time. I remember the debates; it was about two hours long. We were told we shouldn't have any concerns, that nothing would change, and that this was just about being responsible to our EU partners and allies. And then, through that, we deployed.

Even before that, we were already deploying to EU-led missions. One of the more frightening ones, in particular, is Mali. There's been a lot of great research on Mali over the years. I wrote an article

last August about how it really looks like there were two elements we took part in there. In one of them, we were stationed with the Germans doing reconnaissance. It really does look like—I don't know if you remember the Bounti massacre there—in January 2021, France airstruck a wedding and killed around 26 people. They refused to admit what it was, and eventually the UN did an investigation and found that, yes, it was a wedding. It had been monitored by drone for some time before they chose to strike it. And it looks like Ireland was helping the German drone operators who were monitoring that.

Now, there was a question put in by Delinka, a member of the German Bundestag. But the answer to the question about whether it was a German drone was basically classified. So we'll never know whether we were complicit in peacekeeping or complicit in war crimes there. And this kind of thing just goes completely under the radar—it's happening all the time. As Niamh mentioned earlier, we're in battle groups training constantly. We're actually taking troops out of UN peacekeeping missions to divert them to battle group training.

And, you know, we have this narrative coming from the government that the UN Security Council veto is prohibiting us from joining UN peacekeeping missions—that there's a deadlock at the Security Council, where no new peacekeeping missions are being agreed because of the new geopolitical reality, or so on. But the reality is there are eleven UN peacekeeping missions active right now, and we could join any one of them. Instead, we're actually drawing down troops and putting them into the EU battle group situation. So they're really gearing up. And another really frightening development in Ireland is that we've been buying all sorts of weaponry recently. It's like we're sort of answering the—well, you know, Trump has—and I don't want to focus on Trump, but it's hard not to—the demands from the US and NATO to increase military spending.

Ireland, we're starting from a very low base. We're one of the lowest spenders in Europe, but we're now investing billions more in weapons. And this is a new phenomenon—we're buying all sorts. We're buying anti-tank weapons, all sorts of carriers, attack helicopters. Now there are fighter jets that are supposed to be stationed at Shannon Airport to protect our undersea cables that apparently Putin has never stopped thinking about blowing up. You know, all these threats we get, and then all of a sudden the response is to basically militarize, like, in a really rapid way. But we're buying weapons that are not really suitable for a neutral country. It's very, very worrying. Yeah.

#Pascal

It's highly worrying, especially because we see the same trends everywhere. And this argument, of course—that we must do our part, right? Ireland needs to take up responsibility, cannot be a free rider; Switzerland cannot be a free rider—needs to spend enough in order to defend against the threat, which is not really a threat to us. It's like, okay, fine, but for the Irish case, the way this is being sold to the public—or just going around the public, in fact—Niamh, do you think that this drive

is mainly motivated by aspirations toward NATO or aspirations toward the EU? Because it seems to me at the moment that the EU level is also preparing to become more of an independent actor in this... in this stupid politics of warfare and escalation.

#Niamh Ní Bhriain

Yeah, I would say, I mean, if you go back to the European White Paper on Defense Readiness—the 2030 paper that came out in March—that is an incredible piece of reading. It's 22 pages of, you know, basically a war plan. And if you look at that, it's very clear. It says that the US demands that Europe spend more on weapons, so there's that dimension to it. And then it says that NATO is the cornerstone of European security. Right. Now, we also have NATO written into various European Union documents, and at the beginning of the Ukraine war in 2022, we had Ursula von der Leyen coming out and saying, "We are one union, one alliance, united in purpose."

And she says that as she's standing next to Jens Stoltenberg, the former Secretary General. So it's almost indivisible, really. In many ways, you can't separate NATO and the EU—they're two sides of the same coin. And I think what we've seen in the last few weeks, particularly with Greenland, is that I would understand NATO to be a tool of US imperialism, and I would see the European Union as part of that same US imperialism. What we've seen in the last few weeks is more a disciplining of the EU by the US—that we are being disciplined.

We're being told to play our part, to do what needs to be done. You know, we saw a fast deployment of troops to Greenland, then they were recalled again. And then we saw the European Union say, well, now we're going to spend more money on militarizing Greenland—to protect, to please Donald Trump and the demands he's made. We're going to buy a military-grade icebreaker that will be able to operate in Greenlandic territory. So I would say the pressure bearing down on Ireland is coming certainly from Europe, but also from the US. I think there are two things at play. I think that… nobody gets rich from neutrality.

And as Fionn set out, there's an awful lot of money being made—or, you know, being spent—on weapons. So there's a lot of interest. We now have an arms lobby group based in Dublin, the Irish Defence and Security Association, and it counts among its members Lockheed Martin. They've been lobbying the government for the last number of years. If we continue to be a neutral country that's very lightly armed, then there's no money to be made for the arms lobby groups. It wouldn't make logical sense to be tapping into all these military funds that have become available in Brussels as an EU member state if we were to continue our neutrality as it has been—very lightly armed, with an army that serves more or less for peacekeeping missions.

So there's a lot of pressure bearing down on Ireland. If you look at the seat that the arms lobbyists and the arms companies have at the decision-making table in Brussels, that influence is now trickling down to Ireland. We've seen arms lobbyists and arms companies being given a seat at that table for well over a decade at this stage, and now we're seeing the result of that: all the European member

states are becoming more militarized, and Ireland is not outside that trend. So I'd say we can't just dismiss the role of the arms companies.

And I would also say, you know, if there's a neutral state like Ireland on the edge of Europe, it makes the warmongers very uncomfortable, because they can no longer say, "We need to arm up and protect ourselves," if there's a country in Europe that isn't arming up and is actually doing fine—not suffering any threats or attacks or whatever. So this attack on neutrality— we're seeing Finland and Sweden join NATO in the last number of years, and now with Austria there are moves towards further militarization, and with Switzerland, which you covered on your show a few weeks ago.

So the pressure is bearing down. It's not coming from the people up; it's coming externally into Ireland—that we would change our foreign policy and our defense policy, and that neutrality would basically become a thing of the past. And just— I have this document here. John was talking about the Irish Army. The mission— so the Defence Forces' mission is, this is just one line: "Our mission is to provide the military capability to defend Ireland and assigned interests internationally." Now, who is assigning those interests internationally? And what are we— you know, this is a particularly interesting line. Can you repeat that?

#Pascal

Assigned interests, not our interests—assigned interests.

#Niamh Ní Bhriain

Assigned interests internationally—that is our mission. So we're going to be assigned interests; they'll come from the international sphere, and we'll defend those. Now, that's incredibly dangerous language to write into the mission of an army that's supposedly part of a neutral country. And we also have, in our Vision 2030 for the army, that we will be "an agile, fit-for-purpose military force, postured to defend our sovereignty, protect Irish citizens, and secure Ireland's interests." Now, this is a massive shift in language. Ireland's interests? What interests? You know, what are we really talking about?

And it says very clearly: transforming our culture, modernizing our force so it's capable of deterring threats across multiple-domain operational environments. Now, there are no threats to Ireland. We're not under attack. There's been no threat, you know, but this is the shift in language going on in the Irish Defence Forces. And it's preparing us to participate in—well, the question is, where is the pressure coming from? Is it the EU, is it NATO? I don't think you can disentangle them. And I think even though we're not full NATO members, we don't need to be, because we already participate in NATO training. We have a partnership with NATO, as Fionn mentioned—the Partnership for Peace.

We also have a strategic partnership that runs from 2024 to 2028, and it looks specifically at things like cybersecurity, undersea cables, and all that. So it's almost worse—if we were full members of

NATO, there'd be some level of oversight. But because we're not, and we have agreements that most people don't even know about, there's an awful lot going on in the background. I'd imagine that if you walked around Dublin today and asked, "Do you know how embedded we are in NATO?" the vast majority of people wouldn't know, because we've got these kinds of, you know, an agreement here, an arrangement there, and we get away with an awful lot by doing that.

#Pascal

That's cool.

#Fionn Wallace

Can I come in on the NATO–EU question?

#Pascal

Sure.

#Fionn Wallace

I mean, the 2026 defense strategy that the U.S. just published, you know, about two weeks ago, is very, very clear on all this. There's similar language—the same kind of language Niamh just used—in it. They're saying they're going to push their allies around the world to meet the 5% military spending target. And as their, quote, allies do so, together with the United States, they'll be able to field the forces required to deter or defeat potential adversaries in every key region of the world. You know, and we've seen this—like, at the moment, Niamh was on the radio yesterday debating John O'Brien, and he kept going on about this being a brave new world.

"The Transatlantic Alliance is dead. NATO is dead," he said. But the way I see it, the EU is doing precisely what the US and NATO want them to do. And we've seen this again and again. The first time you really saw this was in the Trump era, that sort of rupture from the past. It was May 2017—Trump came to Brussels for the first time, meeting many EU leaders for the first time—and he said it was about time the EU started carrying the can for their own defense. Defense spending at the time was about 1% of GDP, and he wanted them to raise it to two.

But at that time, all of a sudden, you saw a kind of freakout in the establishment media and in the think-tank, Brussels-bubble publications and so on, about how the EU needed strategic autonomy—how it had to go it alone, that we couldn't trust the U.S. anymore. And at the time, you saw this debate talking about how Brexit, Erdoğan, Trump, Putin—this was like a wake-up call for the EU to beef up and handle its own defense. Then, in December 2017, PESCO was basically agreed upon

against this backdrop. It was a record-time agreement on something so significant at the EU level in defense, because there's a lot of disagreement in the EU on defense matters—especially between Germany and France in particular.

But then in December, you saw articles in Politico talking about how this was fantastic—that there was a rapprochement between NATO, the U.S., and the EU agreement—and that basically all the EU seemed to need to do was become a more fully fledged defense union through the PESCO project. Trump comes back, right, in November, and the Republicans and his team point out that defense spending is up to 1.9% of GDP, almost exactly where he asked it to go. And then Mark Rutte comes to the European Parliament and says, "Okay, let's go to 5%." And then the same narrative starts to spread again: Trump is unreliable.

Look at how he is with Ukraine—screwing them over, too friendly with Putin, la la la. And then a couple of months later, we have the Rearm Europe package and the Defense Readiness 2030 white paper. These are plans to go to 5%. You know, 3.5% for actual weapons across the EU by 2030, and 1.5% for military mobility and so on. This is Trump's demand put into practice. And I think what' s going on now has kind of revived again. It's being used—this "Trump is unreliable" thing—over Greenland. They don't really talk about Venezuela so much, but Greenland in particular has been used again to kind of speed things up.

We're not going fast enough to rearm, and this is very, very clear in the 2026 defense strategy. It says, in black and white, that they're going to push us as fast as they can and incentivize us to—quote—"incentivize and enable our allies to step up. This requires a change in tone and style from the past." I mean, they're just going to be really brutal and aggressive about it. Basically, the boss of NATO says "jump," and the EU says "how high." But this narrative that Trump is unreliable is very useful for driving massive rearmament among U.S. allies.

#Pascal

Yeah, this is one of the interpretations of what's currently going on in my little world, very closely connected to an analyst called Brian Baletic, who keeps making the point: look, guys, it's continuity of agenda, division of labor. It's a different tone, but it's the same goal at the end of the day, right? Integration and making Europe usable to U.S. war aims—and therefore this militarization is needed. Now, it also shows how differentiated this strategy is, and how it seems that Ireland is being targeted as something that needs to be brought in line. I mean, maybe not so much as a formal member, but one of Ireland's largest contributions to hindering the EU's full militarization was when the EU crafted its common foreign and security policy.

Ireland insisted on inserting a clause—we call it today the Irish clause—that gives an opt-out to neutral states. Every state has to help protect the other states, and thanks to the Irish, it says "within their constitutional constraints," right? Which basically means, okay, even under the foreign security policy, each state still maintains the right not to participate militarily if push comes to shove.

This is, to me, a very, very important contribution. And that was brought in somewhere in the 2000s—2007, 2008, something around there. And this mindset today seems completely gone, twenty years later. Niamh, Fionn, does one of you have an explanation of how it's possible that back then, twenty years ago, Ireland was actually, you know, standing up for that, right? And today, the leadership seems overly keen and eager to be done with it.

#Niamh Ní Bhriain

Yeah, I mean, I think that's probably the mutual defense clause we're talking about. And this actually came up at a meeting I was at last night. One of the people speaking there has basically dedicated his life's work, since the Single European Act in the 1980s, to critically picking apart the different measures that come from these European treaties—Maastricht, Nice, Lisbon. He's critical of how it doesn't go far enough. It should clearly spell out that this is for Ireland, that Ireland is neutral, and that our neutrality will be protected. The opt-out, you know, it's watered-down language, and it should have gone much further.

And I suppose that, you know, even if—nobody's maybe going to fly into Dublin and put a gun to Micheál Martin's head and say, "Send your troops overseas." But I don't think they'd have to, because there's going to be enough pressure bearing down that I'm sure we would deploy anyway. So even though there is this opt-out clause, I cannot imagine, in a context where the government is getting rid of the triple lock—they clearly don't want to opt out, because the triple lock provides us with a legislative opt-out. You know, we have legislative protection that we will only deploy on United Nations–mandated missions. That is essentially an opt-out, where we say we're not going to go on EU battle groups, we're not going to go on NATO-led missions. The government is deciding to remove that.

And so I cannot imagine—the opt-out clause doesn't give me much confidence, because I see what the government is doing, which is removing our legislative opt-out, if we want to call the triple lock that, to pave the way for there to be essentially no impediment to deploying troops. So I think one thing is what the European Union—the Lisbon Treaty—says in terms of mutual defense and deployment, and another is the opt-out that's built in. And then another is the pressure bearing down on states to be part of this—the language around the "Coalition of the Willing," to be part of a... you know, we've also got Britain in it, but the idea of the Joint Expeditionary Force, all of these different military configurations that Ireland could potentially participate in.

#Pascal

What would it take to get rid of the triple lock? I mean, this is national legislation. Can it be changed by an Act of Parliament alone, or would it require a national referendum? Maybe, Fionn?

#Fionn Wallace

Yeah, there's going to be a vote in the National Parliament. I mean, there's a case that some people are preparing a legal challenge if it does pass, but basically a simple Dáil majority and the Seanad are the key. The Upper House, yeah—exactly. So the Seanad and the Dáil approval, after a process with some amendments, but basically it could be concluded in a matter of weeks. They've announced that they're moving it now. It's been coming for quite a while—they first started talking about it in, like, 2022 or 2023—but a simple Dáil majority is all that's needed.

And, you know, as I was saying before with the Israeli war bonds votes, the government has the majority and they just whip everybody into shape. And even if there are some people maybe at fault—because it's kind of a legacy of their party—they might just, you know… there's definitely a bit of disagreement inside the party about it, because there's pressure coming from below. And it is their legacy. But even if there's some disagreement, we'd kind of expect that they just hold their nose and do what they're told. Because, you know, if you disobey the whip, that's how new parties are formed. So, yeah.

#Pascal

So no, no referendum necessary. No.

#Fionn Wallace

No, there's a legal case—sorry. No, no, go ahead. There would be… there are two things. Basically, there could be a legal case brought, and there is a fairly valid argument that it does deserve a referendum, because in the materials that were sent out during the Lisbon Treaty, it did sort of point to, you know, if we said no—obviously the first two rounds, the Nice and Amsterdam Treaties—but in the materials sent out to the public, it made it clear that if you voted yes, this would be in the context of the triple lock being protected. Apart from that, there's a mechanism in our constitution where, if a law passes, if you get a majority in the Seanad, a third of the Dáil approval, and the assent of the Irish president, then it could be kicked back to the people for a referendum. But if they get a simple majority in the Dáil, it's difficult to see how it would be possible to defeat them in a challenge. So it's one to be worked at.

#Niamh Ní Bhriain

And maybe just to say, in March last year, one of the opposition parties—the Social Democrats, the Soc Dems—brought a motion calling for a plebiscite, because our constitution allows for a plebiscite on questions of national interest. They brought a motion arguing that there should be a plebiscite on this matter, and the government just voted against it. You know, they're very clear—they don't want to ask the people because they know they'll get the wrong answer. So, you know, they've already had the opportunity to hold a plebiscite on this, and they said no.

That was last March, when the bill first came to Cabinet. Then we had the pre-legislative scrutiny during the summer. During that process, there was a lot of testimony raising questions like: will this mean Ireland becomes involved in warfighting missions? Yes, absolutely. Is there a potential that we'll deploy on NATO missions? Yes. On EU battlegroups? Yes. And even with that written into the pre-legislative scrutiny record in Parliament, they still went ahead with the legislation as it is. So, yeah, the next steps are basically as Fionn laid out.

And, you know, Ireland takes the European Union presidency in July. So the sense is that by the 1st of July, what Fionn set out with the two houses of Parliament—they want to have that already done. It'll already be advanced to the stage where the president would be signing it into law. And we'd be able to say, look, here in Ireland, we talked the talk and now we can walk the walk. We've gotten rid of the triple lock, and we're fully able to deploy now on EU military missions and so on.

#Pascal

It's just such a dirty game. It's such a dirty game to do that all under the guise of, like, "it won't touch our neutrality, everything will remain the same," while everything actually changes. And then all you need to do is wait until something happens, and you can give up this one too—just as Finland and Sweden did, right? When the first three Irish deployed soldiers die somewhere in, what do I know, Iraq, Syria—and then, "Oh, we were attacked! Ireland under attack! Three Irish dead. Heroes died. It's now time to finally get rid of it." I mean, something like that. Any final thoughts about this process—Fionn first, and Niamh?

#Fionn Wallace

I just think it's so anti-democratic, what they're up to. You know, meanwhile, Martin never stops. We have this sort of rotating leadership thing going at the moment—sometimes Taoiseach, now Tánaiste. Actually, I'm confused—now Taoiseach again. But, you know, he never tires of talking about authoritarian states and so on, and how we need to defend the forces of democracy from this evil threat. But this is authoritarian in its structure. I mean, Dr. Karen Devine has done years of research, looking at opinion polls going back to around 1982 up to the present day, and she's found that consistently four out of five Irish people favor active neutrality—that this is really strongly connected to our identity as a people.

And it's kind of connected to our—well, you know, it's something deep in the Irish psyche, connected to the anti-colonial struggle and so on—that we value independence and see our neutrality as a sort of vehicle for that independence, as part of our identity. What the government has been doing over the past two years, in particular, is everything in their power, through propaganda, to disassociate neutrality from the triple lock. Whereas Micheál Martin, on the floor of the Dáil back in 2013, said that the triple lock is at the core of Irish neutrality. Now he stands up in the Dáil and says they have nothing to do with each other. So which is it, you know, Micheál? Clearly, they're lying.

And, you know, they're just going to barrel on through this. The propaganda attack—since it was kind of announced early this year that they're going to move with it—has been relentless. Every day there's an article or two talking about how we need to grow up, how we need to be responsible because of this brave new world. Things are changing, and the triple lock must go. It's outdated, it's outmoded—ignoring the fact that, you know, we've been through a Cold War, a Second World War, the so-called War on Terror. We've been through the whole lot of it and maintained neutrality through all that. But all of a sudden, everything's different now, and it has to go.

I think the last polling on it was that maybe 40, 43% of people want some change to the triple lock. But just jettisoning it completely is not what needs to happen. If there's going to be some reform—yes, some sensible reform—yeah, maybe. But the UN aspect is deeply important, and it keeps us out of illegal wars. I think if that was made clear to people, if they were straight up with them, as Niamh said earlier, it would be an entirely different situation. This wouldn't be happening. But they have to lie, because it's disingenuous what they're up to, and they couldn't be straight with the people who are so opposed to losing our neutrality or joining NATO.

#Pascal

Crypto-Atlanticism, Niamh?

#Niamh Ní Bhriain

Yeah, I mean, it's just incredible. You know, we wake up every morning and check—has a new war started overnight? Like, you know, now it's Iran. Last week it was Greenland. A few weeks before that it was Venezuela. And I suppose it's just incredible that, in that context, instead of enhancing the safeguards that keep us out of war, our government is actively planning to remove them—to land us smack bang in the middle of the next war.

And, you know, it's something that, if they manage to do it and we do become embroiled in a war, and Ireland is exposed and attacked—I mean, it would be the first time that we've ever deployed troops into a foreign war. You know, there has to be a serious political reckoning, because that's the reality facing us if the triple lock goes and we begin deployments into conflict zones. So it's a very dangerous moment. I have no faith at all in the government. I have an awful lot of faith in the Irish people. And I suppose what Fionn and I have been doing over the last year is going out and holding political education sessions—neutrality education sessions.

We've been all over the country. Fionn's van is off the road and finished because we've been doing so much driving over the last year—going around to different towns and villages, trying to get on local radio stations, trying to inform people that this is what's happening and organize some opposition to it. So let's see what comes in the next weeks and months. And yeah, ultimately, if the

triple lock does go, then the organizing will be about stopping Irish deployments to war zones, which is probably the reality we'll be facing if the triple lock goes. So it's not over yet. Even if they do manage to get rid of it, then we'll have the next struggle on our hands.

#Pascal

No, it never is. And I congratulate you for that struggle and for actually doing it. You know, it's not the case that we are completely powerless—not at all. We can talk about it, we can educate about it, we can write about it, we can oppose it, and we can go to the streets and so on. And actually, that's what's necessary, because this is a political process. They try to masquerade it and say it's inevitable, that the world imposes it on us. No, it's utter B.S. This is some weird willingness—and I don't quite understand it yet, but we're working on it—of European elites trying to integrate among themselves and with the U.S., rather than actually caring for the nation-state they're elected to serve. You know, something weird is going on, but we'll figure it out over time, and then we'll devise strategies against it. And I'm glad to know that you're working on that in Ireland. Fionn Wallace and Niamh Ní Bhriain, thank you for your time today.

#Niamh Ní Bhriain

Thank you very much, Pascal Lottaz.